

Testimony on Bill No. 5245

An Act Establishing A Task Force To Study The Privatization of Group Homes
James Mc Creath, Ph.D.

Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and Members of the Human Services Committee: Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Jim McCreath. I am the President/CEO of Hall-Brooke Behavioral Health, located in Westport and part of the St. Vincent's Health System in Bridgeport. Hall-Brooke, in concert with St. Vincent's Medical Center offers 92 psychiatric inpatient beds, a six bed psychiatric emergency room, ambulatory clinics in Norwalk and Bridgeport, a special education school and a supportive housing project.

I am here today to urge the creation of a task force to study the privatization of group homes. Certainly, given the State's budget crisis, every option for providing residential care should be explored. In addition, however, I believe non-profits are well positioned and uniquely qualified to operate group homes.

Hall-Brooke's supportive housing project has been in operation for 21 years. The project employs approximately 30 full time equivalent staff. The staff have either a BA or a graduate degree in one of the social services. The project has an annual budget just under 3 million dollars. Funded by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services the project provides permanent, independent housing to 130 adults with a serious and persistent psychiatric disorder and a history of homelessness.

The program philosophy is to provide care in the least restrictive environment and encourage members to exercise autonomy and choice in how they lead their lives. We believe that all individuals, with appropriate supports, can live in the community of their choice and pursue their personal goals. I offer our supportive housing project as just one example of a non-profit with a successful track record in providing residential services to individuals with complex medical/psychiatric/social service needs. Regardless of the particular population served, or the type of housing, non-profits have the infrastructure, organizational depth, and resources to operate these projects.

Non-profit organizations have Boards made up of community members who hold management accountable for meeting organizational goals. Board members are a resource to non-profits in many ways. Board members provide an invaluable link between the non-profit and the community. This link bodes well for helping to integrate the non-profit into the community.

Certainly it is quite common around the country for non-profits to operate group homes. For over 20 years, I was the senior behavioral health executive for two New Jersey hospitals and both hospitals offered group homes and supportive housing projects for disabled children and adults. Similar to Hall-Brooke's partnership with DMHAS, these New Jersey residential projects were funded by grants from NJ State Government. In closing, I again reiterate my whole hearted support for the creation of this force. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today.